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ABSTRACT

To this time, language arts-reading programs established by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) totally immerse the young Indian student in a complete English environment. The real problem is not so much the type of program used, but the feelings of the teachers working with the students. Until very recently, few of the teachers in BIA schools were of Native American descent. Most reading programs for the Indian student stress language performance, exercising intonation rather than language competence. For the Indian child entering school for the first time at the age of seven or eight, there are many immediate problems in adjustment. The child is faced with learning a second language, which involves becoming sensitive to new, very alien sounds, new grammatical-morphological patterns, new word meanings, and a new underlying world view or way of ordering data. In studies conducted with Native American children in both the United States and Mexico, it was found that when students were instructed in their native speech their proficiency in the second language was greater than if they were instructed only in the national language of the country. It is felt bilingual programs would be necessary to ensure equal educational opportunity for every child. (WR)

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EFFECTIVE INFLUENCES ON THE READING-LANGUAGE ARTS DEVELOPMENT OF NATIVE AMERICAN STUDENTS

A group that we know little of and until recently heard only sporatically about, is the Native American. Most of the remaining American Indians have not been acculturated into our Western European culture because of the language and cultural differences which separate the two groups. Most Europeans share many of the same values and mores; their native languages also share many linguistic features, -- what Edward Sapir has labeled "Standard Average European". (Sapir, 1956) The languages of the Native Americans share no such commonalities with either the linguistic roots or value system of Western Europe.

To this time, Language arts-reading programs established by the Bureau of Indian Affairs* totally immerse the young Indian student into a complete English environment. The real problem is not so much the type of program used, but the feelings of the teachers working with the students. Some teachers with whom I worked while teaching at a B.I.A. school stated that the Indian student would not - could not - learn as White children do; their cognitive abilities being inferior. Until very recently, few of the teachers in the B.I.A. schools were of Native American decent and the few that were, usually were being labeled Uncle Tommohawks by the Indian student because of their rather complete, over reactionary acculturation to the Anglo world. Even in the dorms where people served as 'the all important other' or parent substitutes, there is meager association with these people and the native cultural environment of the children. Most reading programs for the Indian students stress language performance,

* (Hereafter Bureau of Indian Affairs will be referred to with the initials B.I.A.)

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exercising intonation rather than language competence. The Native American student can not identify or relate to the message being transmitted by the language they are trying to learn.

As Edward Sapir (1956) states,

> "Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has been the medium of expression for their society. It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of communication or reflection... The fact of the matter is that the "real world" is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group... We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interaction".

What is being implied is that the language we speak is inherently affected by, or is a result of, our communities cultural norms, values and goals. Our perception of all facets of the world's existence, whether these sections are apart of our own community or not, are perceived through and by only one perceptual-linguistic scheme. We may become aware, we may become sensitive to these cultural differences through a process of interaction-education with another community. What this learning is dependent upon is how we perceive the relationships between our life style as differing from another communities and what are the incentives or reasons for learning about these differences.

To illustrate this concept, we will review the study "Beliefs and Values of the Navajo Culture". (Muncy, 1967). The Navajo tribe will be used as an example since this tribe is one of the largest in geographic land holdings and in population. Research in studies on the beliefs of this group suggest that the Navajo children are taught to avoid any individual recognition; this

philosophy is carried through both the social and academic spheres. We are also told that, to the Navajo, humility is a revered personality characteristic. The last point mentioned in this report is that the Navajos in their relationship to a time orientation are concerned with only the present.

From even a superficial review of these stated values it should be evident that these norms contrast markedly with those of the majority-North American population or cultural group. To continue with an analysis of cultural differences we find such statements as "A feeling of lack of control over the environment--a lack of western tendency to attack unfamiliar situations directly and overcome them by force--are cultural traits of Indian society". (Zintz, 1967)

Whorf in "Language and Logic" (1956, pp. 223-345) indicates that many of the ways Indians are in the process of organizing thought in terms of language are greatly different from English. Edward T. Hall in "The Silent Language" describes some of the differences between the Native American and Anglo cultures,

> "The Pueblo Indians, for example, who live in the Southwest, have a sense of time which is at complete variance with the clock bound habits of the ordinary American citizens. For the Pueblos events begin when the time is ripe and no sooner. To the old-time Navajo time is like space-only the here and now is quite real. The future has little reality to it...only the immediate gift has reality; a promise of future benefits is not even worth thinking about. (Edward Hall, 1957)

Hall goes on to give other accounts of insights which project strong cultural differences between the Anglo and Indian value systems.

For the Indian child entering school for the first time at the age of seven or eight and sometimes older, there are many immediate problems in adjustment. The child is faced with learning a second language which

involves becoming sensitive to new, very alien sounds, new grammatical-morphological patterns, word meanings, and a new underlying world view or ways of ordering data: new experiences which are then internalized into the consciousness-- but consciousness in what reality? These new encounters are not learnt in direct response to developing consciousness of the world as it was in the child's initial development or as the first language was. But even beyond this trauma for the child is the fact that this new stream of ideas and experiences is being directed through an alien system along with this system's inclusive members, people foreign to the world of the Indian child. These new ideas are not learned from the all important Significant Others--parents or parent--surrogates-but from strangers, often feared adults of a different cultural world. The learning situation itself may create tensions leading to failure especially if the learner is deprived of the support of his primary social group. School is still an extremely threatening place to many Indian children. It should be pointed out that many times Indian students attend schools hundreds of miles from their homes and that they may be able to visit their families once or twice a year. This can be true for a child 5 years old as well as for older students.

In a concluding statement made in the study, American Indian Ethnic Attitudes in Relation to School Achievement, Annabelle Scoon states,

> "Of five categories viewed negatively, one is Indian: Indian tribal officers; one is specifically white: Anglo teachers; three could be mixed: Dormitory aids, Policeman, and School...We can thus, I believe, say that there is little evidence here of an integrative feeling towards the Anglo culture. The authority of the Anglo men is accepted, Anglo women and teenagers belong to a different world, while Anglo teachers represent disagreeable authority. Positive feelings are reserved for Indians and family. School itself is disagreeable and somewhat distant". (Scoon, 1971)

Many of the Indian teachers at B.I.A. schools have adopted this philosophy. A problem has arisen since many of the ethnic identity movements have increased in acceptance, especially among younger ethnic minority students. These young people are reacting to members of their own ethnic group who have adopted both the language and many of the values and goals of the predominent culture.

In the report, Affective Influences on English Language Learning Among Indian Students, Ms. Scoon states,

> "In earlier times, some Indians certainly accepted the Protestant ethnic fully, and attained success in its terms. The Indian teachers in B.I.A. schools are generally strong advocates of this attitude. Many students apparently no longer trust these beliefs enough to allow them to guide their actions". (Scoon, 1971)

This attitude is growing in acceptance by the present Indian student population. The affects of this reaction can be seen in the results of student attitudes mentioned in the previously mentioned article.

From information present in the body of this paper we can infer that there is an unhealthy relationship between any of the Native American students, their communities with its values and goal systems and the use of English as a second language. Again referring to the study on Indian Ethnic Attitudes the author states,

> "...These studies indicate that although both attitude and motivation are correlated with second-language learning success, the most important variable that distinguishes between more and less successful learners is motivation. Two types of motivation are found: instrumental, in which the student wishes to learn the language in order to make some particular use of it; and integrative in which he learns in order to be able to know the world of the other language better, grow closer to its speakers and perhaps be more like them...The use of English is forced upon children at the age when they have just learned how to function well in their native languages and the need for the new language makes them again impotent communicators, subject to frustration and confusion. Negative feeling toward the language, and by extension to its speakers could certainly develop". (A. Scoon, 1971)

Again directing these ideas to the young Indian learner of English as a Second Language, the author of English as a Second Language, a Measure of Intelligence, Achievement and Adjustment, states,

> "The 'crossover" that takes place at about the third or grade, when Indian children's achievement starts downhill in relation to their white classmates, is, if the theory of this study is correct, partly the result of inadequate learning of English and partly the result of the strain that the shift to English creates on the developing personality. The inadequate learning of English may be partly due, in turn, to negative or ambivalent attitudes to the dominant white culture, which is pressing hard on the Indian cultural identity the child has only partially established..." (A. Scoon and J. Blanchard, 1970)

From all of these reports, we can conclude that something must be done to change the negative attitudes toward the learning of English as a Second Language by the Indian children if, (1) the Indian students are to adjust to the learning of English at any point in their lives which will in turn effect their chances for acquiring an education, (2) the students development of a healthy self-concept and (3) the students learning to adjust between the patterns of living amongst the Indian and Anglo life styles. (Scoon, 1971)

In studies conducted with Native American children in both the United States and Mexico it was found that when students were instructed in their native speech that their proficiency in using both the native language with English and Spanish respectively was greater than those taught with only the national language of the country. It is believed that the children became more secure in their language development when the initial instruction was directed through their native languages. Strengthing the mother tongue facilitated the transfer to the second language and improved the overall educational potential of the students. (J. Kobrick, 1972)

Some States, Massachusetts being one, have realized that classes

conducted exclusively in English are inadequate for the education of children whose native tongue is other than English. It is felt bilingual programs would be necessary to ensure equal educational opportunity for every child. (Case for Bilingual Education) Minority or second language speaking students do not need compensatory or remedial programs. What we need is a change of view, one that is not a reflection of our past one sided approach to education. The English only philosophy of this country has missed the opportunity to teach a child in his own language.

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